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ON TECHNICAL TEXTS: FROM MANUSCRIPTS TO ACCESSIBLE MATERIAL VIA THE WORK OF THE PHILOLOGIST

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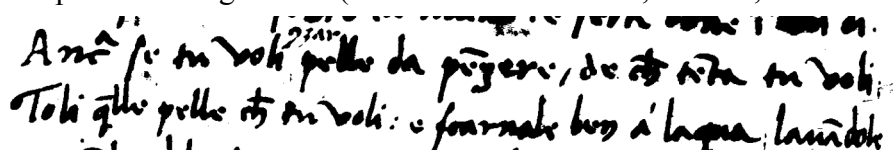
Among the various texts informing us about technical applications and their circulation during the late Middle Ages, we can also find texts that contain practical instructions. Included in this group — together with organized treatises, compilations of portions extracted from treatises, and individual recipes scattered between manuscript margins or their guard foils — are also compilations of recipes not closely related to each other and nearly always written anonymously. This text type, which we can call *recipe books*, is amazingly well-represented in the 15th and 16th centuries[2]: a haphazard array of technical, medical, cosmetic, alchemical, culinary notes, sometimes even of literary or chronachistic nature, collected in texts and assigned to a “tradition that we cannot even in a summarized description see as homogeneous in intents and destinations”[3].

The role of the expert in ancient texts is to act as an intermediary and interpreter between the “raw” and messy material found in a handwritten context and the formulation of information that can be exploited in different fields of interest.

Reading the manuscripts, transcribing the text, inserting punctuation and diacritical marks and perhaps explanatory notes are key steps to gaining an understanding of the text; a translation may be needed when there are strong vernacular connotations or the syntax differs from current usage. A glossary may be a helpful aid to find correspondences between obscure words (now abandoned or highly technical or unclear in the word-thing correspondence) and current usage.

Some examples of rendering a raw manuscript into a readable text are given below.

1. A recipe for tanning leather (Biblioteca Riccardiana, Firenze, MS. 1246, f.44v):



Anc(ora) se tu voli pelle da pigiare, de ch(e) te(n)ta tu voli
Toli q(ue)lle pelle ch(e) tu voli: e scarnale ben a' l' aqua: lava(n)dole
e mo(n)dandole da ogni carnazo, e da ogni machia [...].

DIPLOMATIC TRANSCRIPT:

Anc(or)a se tu voli (chonzar) pelle da pe(n)zere, de ch(e) te(n)ta tu voli
Toli q(ue)lle pelle ch(e) tu voli: e scarnale ben a' l' aqua: lava(n)dole
e mo(n)dandole da ogni carnazo, e da ogni machia [...].

INTERPRETIVE TRANSCRIPT:

Ancora se tu voli conzar[4] pelle da penzere de che tenta tu voli, toli quelle pelle
che tu voli e scarnale bene al' aqua, lavandole e mondandole da ogni carnazo e
da ogni machia [...].

TRANSLATION:

Again, if you want to tan leather for dyeing it in whatever color you want, take the
leathers that you like and accurately strip the flesh from them in water, rinse and
clean them of any residual flesh and stains [...].

2. A recipe for the production of iron gall ink (Biblioteca Riccardiana, Firenze, MS. 1247, c.49r):

*Ricetta p(er) fare ichiostro buo.
Onze 4 d(e) galla & spezata lire 3 d(e) vino bianco la
galla & lo vin stara giorni 9 alo(m)bra i(n) capo di 9*

DIPLOMATIC TRANSCRIPT:

*Ricetta p(er) fare ichiostro buo(no)
Onze 4 d(e) galla & spezata lire 3 de vino bianco la
galla et lo vin stara giorni 9 alo(m)bra i(n) capo di 9
giorni metterai la gomma arabica onze dua [...].*

INTERPRETIVE TRANSCRIPT:

Ricetta per fare i(n)chiostro buono. Onze 4 de galla espezata, lire 3 de vino bianco; la galla et lo vin starà giorni 9 al' ombra. In capo di 9 giorni metterai la gomma arabica onze dua [...].

TRANSLATION:

Recipe for making good ink. [Take] 4 ounces of minced gall, 3 pounds of white wine; keep the gall and the wine in the dark for 9 days. After 9 days, add 2 ounces of gum arabic [to this blend] [...].

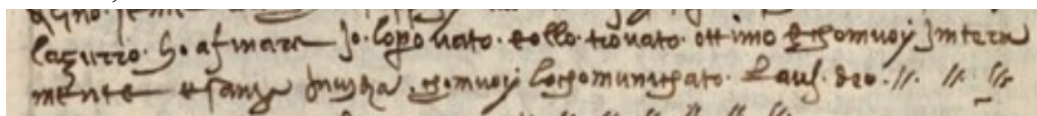
But is the validity and credibility of these recipes assured? Very often it is the text that provides the useful information in this regard. This can be noted when the text speaks for itself, telling us whether the recipes really work or not. Indeed, the copyist/user may mark his disappointment or satisfaction with the recipe on the foil, so that it serves as a guide for future readers.

3. A marginal note following a recipe for tanning chamois leather (Wellcome Library, Londra, MS. 738, f.36v):

Nota ch' qsta ricetta niente vale.

Nota che questa ricetta niente vale. (Note that this recipe isn't worth anything.)

4. A note at the end of a recipe for making blue dye (Wellcome Library, Londra, MS. 425, f.120r):



Io l'ò provato e òllo trovato ottimo. (I've tried it and found it excellent.)

[1] Those that Stussi called *tracce* (A. Stussi, *Tracce*, Bulzoni, Roma 2001), defining a term employed earlier by A. Petrucci (*Spazi di scrittura e scritte avventizie nel libro altomedievale*, in *Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell'Alto Medioevo: 16-21 aprile 1998*, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, Spoleto 1999, pp. 981-1005, here p. 981).

[2] M. Clarke, *The Art of All Colours. Mediaeval Recipe Books for Painters and Illuminators*, Archetype, Londra 2001, p. 28 reviews nearly 250 MSS. containing non-isolated vernacular recipes (not necessarily all in Italian). The amount today could be twice as many.

[3] The translation is mine. A. Vitale-Brovarone, *Ò preso pensieri di fare questo librecto. Piccole enciclopedie in volgare*, in *L'enciclopedismo dall'Antichità al Rinascimento*, C. Fossati (ed.), Dipartimento di Antichità, Filosofia e Storia dell'Università di Genova, Genova 2011, p. 167.

[4] *conzar* aggiunto in interlinea con segno di integrazione.